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Statement submitted by Women's Intercultural Network, a non-governmental organization in consultative with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The Women's Intercultural Network, along with our partners, applaud the Commission on the Status of Women for giving us an opportunity at the sixty-third session to address social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Women's Intercultural Network's mission is to ensure that all women and girls are represented and have a voice in their government, economy, and civil society. It is also critical that their voices be heard during the sixty-third annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women in regard to the priority theme and sustainable development review theme. It has increasingly come to our attention that women's progress is being halted by cutting funds to essential services on which women and girls rely and the legitimacy of protection systems is being undermined by far-right populist discourse.

In July 2018, The Human Rights Council published a report on extreme poverty and human rights in the United States of America. The report paints rather a grim picture of the state of social protections and social services in the United States. It touches on areas such as gendered nature of poverty, racism, disability and demonization of poverty or healthcare. Looking at gendered inequality, the United Nations Special Rapporteur highlights the increasing number of children living in poverty with single mothers, which has risen "from fewer than 100,000 in 1995 to 895,000 in 2011 and 704,000 in 2012." According to the report "children [were] comprising 32.6 per cent of all people in poverty [in 2016]". Moreover, a majority of the poor live in rural areas with limited access to healthcare causing "African-American maternal mortality rates [to] almost double" in recent years. Institutionalized racism and disability further limits individuals in their potential to rise out of poverty. In closing, the report warns against fraud rhetoric on abusive behavior of individuals who want to take advantage of social benefits while they could be working and argues against cutting essential social programs.

Thus, Women's Intercultural Network expresses a deep disapproval with the recent United States budget proposal for 2019 and welfare reform aiming at many anti-poverty programs, health care benefits, education and social security with significant funding cuts while defence spending will see a budget boost. With lower funding for income security programs and social service block grants, the safety net for handicapped, families and low income will further impair their path to self-sufficiency. In a country that is already struggling with deep poverty on one hand and the highest income disparity in the world on the other, such severe cuts to the anti-poverty programs will further disproportionately affect women, especially single mothers, and children who rely on these social programs. In accordance, health care cuts will further inflict harm on low income and new mothers due to the lack of preventative care affordability. Although economic recovery is well behind us and today reports in the media portray a picture of an economic prosperity, austerity measures previously implemented have never been fully reversed and today's far right neoliberal rhetoric contributes to the justification of even deeper carving out of the social safety net.

As a non-governmental organization operating globally to ensure the equal access of women and girls to fair and unbiased social protection systems, Women's Intercultural Network recommends the following to ensure all related goals to the priority theme are considered, including the Sustainable Development Goals. In the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women 60 (number 8), the Commission identified the persistence of the feminization of poverty and emphasized that "the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development." The need to

ensure an adequate standard of living for women and girls throughout the life cycle, including through social protection systems is central to ensuring their success.

The Commission suggested governments undertake all appropriate measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and poverty work by prioritizing social protection policies, including accessible and affordable quality social services, and care services for children, persons with disabilities, older persons, persons living with HIV and AIDS and all others in need of care, and promote the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. How will we achieve these measures?

Since non-governmental organizations are a critical link for civil society to connect women and girls with social protection services, Women's Intercultural Network first recommends that non-governmental organizations supporting all civil services by way of care work, family planning, elderly care, and community healthcare should tailor their research and program offerings to ensure optimal partnership with state led public services that often fail to fully assist those in need, especially women and girls when there are gender biases present in society. Non-governmental organizations are the critical link to fill in the gaps where state run agencies often fail to assist.

Our second recommendation is to begin at the root cause of the reason women and girls lack access to fundamental social services - inequality. Non-governmental organizations operating in civil society should ensure part of their programs and offerings offer women some degree to political participation where they are in the position to affect policy and change laws in place that are not ensuring their equal access. In 2018, the state of California passed Senate Bill 826 requiring that publicly held companies have one woman on their boards of directors by the end of 2019. From there, women's representation will have to increase. By the end of July 2021, companies have to have at least two women on boards of five members and at least three women on boards with six or more. While the law's fate with our current federal administration is uncertain, it is proof that elevating women to influence policy will help guarantee equal representation. In order to ensure access to public services and social protection systems, non-governmental organizations will need to bridge the gaps between state-run government social services and often unaffordable private sector offerings. The policy mechanism for this that non-governmental organizations have on hand that is effective globally regardless of religion, legalities, and cultural inclinations is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The Women's Intercultural Network is actively collaborating with partners throughout the US to implement and uphold the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) through our Cities for CEDAW campaign. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is a pillar document on which the United Nations member states can build equal access communities and utilize as guidelines for offering social services to women and girls, especially in the public sphere. Through Women's Intercultural Network's Cities for CEDAW campaign we are raising awareness throughout the country that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women strengthens the Sustainable Development Goals aimed at ensuring the equality of women and girls at a local level and provides a mechanism for local governments to implement Sustainable Development Goals targeted at women and girls' equality and empowerment.

In conclusion, social protection systems require full funding and structural reassembling in order to ensure women and girls' equal and fair access to public services. Local governments in partnership with non-governmental organizations can build a sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by re-tooling their public services delivery and funding prioritization in accordance with the guidelines established by the Convention on the Elimination of

All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The Women's Intercultural Network encourages non-governmental organizations and the public sector to apply the gender-focused evaluation, practices and metrics outlined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women to implement these globally accepted guidelines at a local level.